

The Queens' summer residence

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well that his means were limited, and gave him also some picture postcards of Segesta. He accepted it all delightedly and gratefully, and we finally exchanged addresses.

Half an hour later our ways parted. My own went down to the station while he took up a favorable position to snatch another ride to the south. Whenever I turned my head Knut was still standing there, and every time I saw him he waved his hand to me. His figure became smaller and smaller until a bend in the road made him disappear.

Travelling back to Palermo I thought of a sentence once written by a Swiss writer in one of her novels. It was a sentence I had never been able to forget. «To look at someone beloved is the most intrinsic embrace we know of, the one which sinks down into our hearts and stays there alive for all eternity.»

Richard Arlen

The Queens' Summer Residence

Despite the notoriety of Cherry Grove on Fire Island hard by New York City, nevertheless, the most persistently popular spot of summer rendezvous for the gay elite of Canada and America remains Provincetown, Massachusetts, at the tantalizing tip of Cape Cod. As a tested Treffpunkt for the Third Sex, it has no rival on the Atlantic Seaboard, and it is to be feared the economy of that community would suffer a deadly blow were the City Fathers and the Provincetown equivalent of a Frauenverein ever to pass legislature, requiring all summer visitors to be «straight».

However, this is not to say that Provincetown is in itself an irregular and unconventional summer colony. In fact, after its own fashion, it is conventional in the extreme, and represents but another facet of the passion for conformity in contemporary American life, which has provoked the appearance of a book entitled, «A Nation of Sheep».

Certain kinds of conduct, schedules of activity and styles of haberdashery are as rigidly *de rigueur* in Provincetown's gay midsummer madness as in the Colony Club of New York or La Couronne in Bruxelles. This is what makes Provincetown so ironically amusing a colony for any cosmopolite to observe; he is mockingly diverted by the blatant provincialism of all these presumably free souls who flock there each summer to express themselves—but only in the prescribed Bohemian manner, that will make them acceptable to their peers. Togetherness (horrid word) is as rampant in Provincetown as it ever was in Outer Podunk.

For anyone who even vaguely hopes to be «accepted» into the annual gay colony of this beachhead for inverts a certain daily schedule is imperative. This involves a late rising, *ça va sans dire*, followed perhaps by a brief trip to the core of the town to a store called Patrick's, where the New York papers are purveyed, but a hasty return. It is not *comme il faut* to be seen on Commercial Street during the heart of the day; one might be mistaken for that odious creature «a tourist».

The heart of the day must be faithfully devoted to organizing for the trip to the beach, motoring to the beach, and beaching. When the crowd feels rather energetic, beaching may take place as far afield as

the high-cliffed beach at Truro called Longnook; but more frequently, the point of no return is New Beach at Provincetown itself, and a particular section of New Beach, which is designated by a row of owned or rented long cars and station wagons parked at the very extreme end of the parking area for this beach. Leftward Ho is the watchword for all Provincetown belles.

From here the pairs, trios and quartets drag their indolent derrières over the scraggly sand dunes, littered with beer cans and paper refuse, to a low, flat beach, which, as a swimming locale, could hardly be called ideal. The strand is covered with pebbles, not sand, and the underwater surface is a mass of small rocks that bruise the soles of the feet. It is uncomfortable to walk down to the water's edge and even more uncomfortable to walk out into the water. Neanmoins, this is *the* beach where one must be *seen*, and so there the homosexual sheep go daily.

In any event, they do not go to swim. They go to loll, to gossip, to drink, and, above all, to acquire a Coppertone that will be the envy of their fellows in the office or store when they return to New York or Toronto. Naturally, land cruises also take place every afternoon on a thirty-minute schedule, between eleven and four.

Fairly promptly at four p.m. an exodus begins. Some of the *mademoiselles de la plage* are headed home for an intime *partie de cocktail* at Captain Jack's or The Ranch, where they have temporary and expensive digs. But for the greater number the next port of call, where they *must* make daily *acte de presence*, is the Moors, a Portuguese-owned *Wirtschaft* at the foot of Bradford Street.

Here in a low-raftered room, at deliberately (artistically?) crude wooden tables, the bevy of beach beauties perches for the afternoon drinkgab. The reason for this function being timed between four and five is that, come 5:30 at the latest, they are all quite firmly evicted by the management, to make way for the dinner crowd, which is «straight», or, rather, presumably straight.

Between five-thirty and ten-thirty, this school of gay fish vanishes from sight, behind closed doors, sometimes into restaurants for dinner (although never—to be chic—before nine p.m.), though more often into their dwellings. On occasion they continue on to the Art Cinema, to see some major European opus such as «*La Dulla Vita*», or even to the plain local movie palace.

From ten-thirty on they begin to trickle in the same pairs, trios and quartets, into the back room of a restaurant on Commercial Street called The Town House, which is reasonably «straight» by day, but by night. Whoops.

Entertainment is here provided in the form of LP music from new and old musical comedies, with the accent on the Merman, and by a pianist, who renders numbers at request. Dancing is not permitted, except the sort of individual wriggling and amateur grinding usually done by rather too mature belles with uncorseted stomachs who ought to know better but don't. Having come to Provincetown for two weeks to fool themselves that they are still young, young, young, they insist on being conspicuous about being old, old old.

The solitary stranger or the pair of newcomers will have no better

luck here, as a rule, than they would at the Cosy Bar in Copenhagen, because The Town House is *not* a hangout for hustlers. It is rather surprising that more hustlers—or at least more poules de luxe—do not come to Provincetown in the summer for the purpose of meeting up with gentlemen of means. If this community were in Europe, it would be swarming with gigolos of the type who flock to Cannes during la saison in search of rich, mature fools. There are reasonably well-upholstered characters around Provincetown ranging in age from thirty-five to sixty each summer; but there are very few opportunistic young faggots seeking to ensnare them, and, consequently, they often have a rather lonely time of it there, both at the beach and at The Town House. Provincetown is primarily a community for young gazelles between eighteen and twenty-eight. They cruise each other and have what they later describe as «a mad whirl»; but for any one over twenty-eight who does not have a circle of friends, Provincetown is not a good locale. The management of The Town House, it need hardly be said, assumes no responsibility for performing introductions among the guests, and, if they did, the guests would be *furious!* They don't come there to be democratic.

At one o'clock this emporium closes its doors for the night; the beaux depart with their stratagems for their voitures and vanish into the drowsy night.

Is there a meat rack? Where is there not a meat rack? The one in Provincetown is located in front of the Town Hall, whose clock knoweth no time but its own.

The next day the same precise routine is pursued all over again.

Mention was made earlier about conformity of haberdashery. There are two sorts of costume prevalent in this social set. The hardy souls appear, even at night (and it is often rather chilly there at night) in short-sleeved sport shirts and short pants of duck, yes, duck. The less hardy wear sweaters and tight-fitting pants of khaki or denim. They are not slacks, which hide the gams; they are thigh-snug pants.

A middle-aged man who appears in The Town House, wearing a coat and tie and slacks, and behaving himself with reserve and dignity, sitting quietly at a table, is regarded as a foul outsider, perhaps even a plain-clothes man (Ugh!). By such a costume and such behaviour, this individual is only asking to be ostracized. Where the European gigolo would spot such a man at once as his most lucrative prey, the young American homosexual will avoid him at all costs. Indeed, the only way the older man can get himself tolerated by the «in-group» at Provincetown is to dress in a manner unbecoming to his years, laugh noisily, be a «mother» type, and generally make a public ass of himself. He may then be thought amusing, in the sense of being good for a few laughs, and be permitted a certain degree of entrée, provided he does not become so bumptious as to proposition anyone noticeably his junior. In America no man over forty is considered to have a vestige of sex appeal remaining.

One of the more idiotic aspects of American gay life to be noted in Provincetown is that American and Canadian queens are often either too shy or too snobbish to show any sign of outward interest in the very person they would like most to meet until the moment when that person prepares to depart. Then, when it is too late, all of a hot flash, the cold-

fishy stares are replaced by warm, human glances. American queens often have a great deal of amour propre; they are terrified of losing face by making the first overture and being rejected; therefore they venture nothing and gain nothing.

To delve more deeply into the psychology involved, one must recognize that in the northern part of the western hemisphere the homosexual is at one and the same time a conceited person and an insecure person. He is conceited about his looks, his clothes, his youth, his social acquaintance and his automobile and in some Madison Avenue instances, his income; but he is insecure about his personal value as a human being and about his identity as a person worthy of love, apart from his social status. This insecurity makes him reluctant, even in a convivial atmosphere, to speak to anyone else without the formality of an introduction by a third party. This coyness can be observed all the way from a bar such as The Town House to the gymnasium of the West Side «Y» in New York. Curiously enough, the most conceited ones are not the boys with some kind of real status in the world; they are far more often the professional photographers' models and the chorus singers and dancers from Broadway and television.

It is not uncommon at New Beach in Provincetown for strangers who might like each other very much if they could only break the ice, to place their towels in proximity to each other on the sand for three or four afternoons in a row without even saying, «Good day».

This sort of reluctance might not be too impractical if each visitor had the entire summer to spend at Provincetown. But the great majority of them can afford to come there for only two weeks. Provincetown rents are high. A room for four dollars a day is a bargain. With such pressure confining the amount of time, one might think the girls would see the advantage of forgetting social decorum and formal introductions, and working fast. But they can't bring themselves to do this. What would their friends think? America, although once a country founded on a Declaration of Independence, is now a country in which true independence of behaviour is scarce; the result is that most people do not dare do many things they long to do out of fear of what their friends will think.

As a result of this situation, very, very few homosexuals risk coming to Provincetown alone. They are afraid, and, rightly so, of being left «on the outside». So they come, as a rule, in pairs, but not necessarily in mated pairs. This makes things all the more bewildering all around, since it is manifestly impossible to discern from their deportment to each other whether they are an old married couple a little bored with each other, or just friends, each of whom is desperately hoping to meet someone else.

The end consequence of the social code of conduct in Provincetown's gay world is that while, with more time, quite a few visitors might make some firm new fun pals, nowhere near as many of them will make out as they could succeed in doing in the more random and flagrant milieu of Cherry Grove at one third the cost for transportation.

The chief distinction between a European gay bar and a American gay bar of the type of The Town House remains then the fact that, in Europe.

he who is willing to pay the price, can find *something* whereas in America he can be fairly sure that, even if he would be willing to pay the price, he won't find anything. Thus, between summer abroad or summer at home, you pays your money and you takes your choice. Anyone for Asia?

HADRIAN

My god, he's stupid . . .

It is not unreasonable to presume that occasionally Apollo, or Hercules, tiring of their loves on Olympus, come again to earth and momentarily assume a human form, and make love to us poor mortals. And having sex with a god is quite a jolt to one's universe. It takes some little time thereafter for the nebulae to stop their spiral whirling, and for the stars to settle down into their accustomed and familiar constellations.

I looked at him, as my sight gradually came back. He had arisen from the bed, and was standing in front of the full-length mirror, idly flexing his great muscles, treating me to a view of the tanned and wonderful landscape of his back, his torso, those great-columned legs lighted with the soft luminance of the golden hairs that covered them. His eyes, cornflower blue, Nordic (how they could darken and flash as they filled with passion!) now took in, like mine, the poetry of his movements; muscle answered muscle, flickering into indolent or rapid life as he ordered his body to do his bidding. And god-like was his profile as he tilted his chin upwards, and god-like the full-face front, as his eyes, half-smiling, looked at me from under the sweep of his golden hair, bleached by the summer sun until the end-points of it seemed tipped with silver. His massive tawny shoulders tapered down the incredible terrain of his torso to the slender waist, and ended in the smoky gold of the softly curling hair . . .

So he posed, and moved, and posed again, while from the caverns of my mind I pulled the symphonies he did not hear, and read the poems he could not see. Then I thought of the right thing, the best comparison that I could make (although I had made it before to others, and only half meant it), and I said,

«You remind me, you know, of some young god who has just stepped down from the frieze on the Parthenon.»

The blue eyes sought mine, and a little puzzled frown creased the perfect arch between his golden brows.

«The freeze on the parking-lot? Whatdyuh mean?»

—John McAndrews